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Research Report on America's Cities

POVERTY IN CITIES

A Research Report of the National League of Cities

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POVERTY IN CITIES

by

Mark Alan Hughes

February 1989

A Research Report of the National League of Cities

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PREFACE

The National League of Cities is pleased to present *Poverty in Cities* to city officials, state municipal leagues, and others concerned about poverty in America.

The views expressed in the report are Dr. Hughes', not necessarily NLC's. The report treats a significant topic in thoughtful, useful, and provocative ways. We hope it will promote better understanding and increased discussion of the problems of persistent, concentrated, and isolated poverty in America's cities.

The author, Dr. Mark Alan Hughes, is on leave from his post as Assistant Professor at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School for the 1988-89 academic year.

During this year, Dr. Hughes holds the Lincoln Government Fellowship, a research position at NLC that is cosponsored by NLC and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

William R. Barnes
Research Director
National League of Cities

INTRODUCTION

Poverty in cities is changing in quality and intensity. It is more persistent among particular households, more concentrated within particular neighborhoods, and more isolated from traditional avenues of escape.

This report extends the findings of a 1987 research report from the National League of Cities.[1] That earlier report demonstrated the increasing magnitude and changing incidence of poverty in the United States. The paragraphs that follow summarize those national findings before turning to the more specifically urban focus of this report.

The *magnitude* of poverty refers to the amount of poverty at a given time. The poverty rate is commonly used to compare magnitudes from different times. A resurgence of poverty occurred between 1979 and 1983. The poverty rate drifted downward throughout most of the 1970s and stood at 11.7 percent in the last year of that decade. By 1983, however, the poverty rate had risen to 15.2 percent.

The rate has decreased since 1983, but the 1980s remain a more poverty stricken decade than the 1970s. For the years 1970 through 1979, the average poverty rate was 11.8 percent. The average rate for the years 1980 through 1987 was 14.1 percent, an increase of 19.4 percent.

The *incidence* of poverty refers to the shares of total poverty as they are distributed across specific groups or places. *The incidence of poverty has changed by region, by residence, and by age group.*

All regions of the country experienced an increase in their poverty rate between 1979 and 1985. The North Central region underwent the largest increase, from 9.7 percent to 13.9 percent (a percentage increase of 43 percent). As a result of larger percentage

increases, the North Central and West regions increased their share of the nation's poor between 1979 and 1985.

The majority of the nation's poor reside in metropolitan areas, and the metropolitan share increased substantially between 1979 and 1985. Sixty-two percent of the poor lived in metropolitan areas in 1979, and that metropolitan share increased to 70 percent in 1985. The metropolitan poor increased by 7,645,000 persons between 1979 and 1985. In central city areas, 5,739,000 persons entered the poverty population. In suburban areas, 1,906,000 persons were added to the poverty population.

Poverty among children has increased substantially. In 1979, 16.1 percent of related children under 18 years of age lived in a poor household; in 1985, the figure was 20.5 percent. This represents a startling increase of 27.3 percent in the youth share of poverty over this six-year period.

This report provides an overview of recent research that seeks to understand these complex numbers. In particular, it focuses on one of the more difficult components: inner-city poverty in our larger metropolitan areas. The nation has become increasingly aware of troubling issues such as homelessness, gang violence, and crack houses. These diverse images of the inner city have helped return poverty to the national agenda.

How we build these fragmentary images into a better understanding of contemporary urban poverty is crucial. How we think about problems helps determine what we propose as solutions. Different understandings of poverty in large cities lead to very different strategies for confronting it.

This report discusses three dimensions of poverty in cities: persistence, concentration, and isolation; three explanations of poverty in cities: mismatch, culture, and decentralization; and finally three policy strategies aimed at poverty: dispersal, development, and mobility.

DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY IN LARGE CITIES

Poverty is complex, and scholars have long sought ways to manage this complexity by identifying the crucial dimensions of poverty. This section considers three such dimensions: persistence, concentration, and isolation. Persistence refers to time, while concentration and isolation refer to space. All three dimensions are important but each highlights a distinct dimension of poverty in cities.

Persistence

The first dimension of poverty in cities is "persistence," which refers to the length of time that a person remains poor. Persistence of poverty is important because one long spell of poverty is probably more damaging than several short spells, and because changes in the levels of persistent poverty inform us about the chances of escaping poverty.

A recent study by Adams, Duncan and Rodgers gives us a picture of persistent urban poverty and how it has changed since the 1960s.[2] They estimate the changes in persistent poverty from 1969 through 1983. The authors measure persistence using the proportion of the urban poor in a given year who escaped poverty by the following year. For each year, they calculate this "escape probability".

In the late 1960s, the escape probability of the urban poor was about 32 out of 100. The escape probability steadily increased through the mid-1970s to about 37 out of 100 (meaning that poverty became less persistent during this period). But from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s, the escape probability steadily decreased 14 points to about 23 out of 100.

Thus, poverty has become more persistent since the mid-1970s, and there has been a substantial decrease in the chances that a poor person will escape poverty within the following year.

In addition to other interesting results, Adams, Duncan and Rodgers estimate the number of persistently poor persons by race during the ten-year period from 1974 through 1983.

TABLE 1
Persistence of Poverty

Highly Urban Population*	Never Poor 1974-1983 (%)	Ever Poor 1974-1983 (%)	Persistently Poor** 1974-1983 (%)
Black Persons	40.0	60.0	21.1
Nonblack Persons	72.1	27.9	2.7

* Central counties of metro areas with one million or more population
** Persons who were poor at least 80 percent of the time, 1974-1983

SOURCE: Adapted from Adams, Duncan and Rodgers

As Table 1 shows, three of five black persons in highly urban areas were poor at least once during the ten-year period, and black persons were twice as likely as nonblack persons to be poor at least once during the ten-year period (60.0 percent versus 27.9 percent).

Furthermore, one in five black persons in highly urban areas were persistently poor throughout the ten-year period, and black persons were almost eight times more likely than nonblack persons to be persistently poor (21.1 percent versus 2.7 percent).

Concentration

A second dimension of poverty in cities is "concentration," which refers to poor persons living in poor neighborhoods. Concentration of poverty is important because poor persons living in poor neighborhoods might be less able to escape from poverty than poor persons living in more diverse neighborhoods.

A recent study by Bane and Jargowsky examines the changes in concentrated poverty between 1970 and 1980 in the fifty largest cities.[3] They define concentrated poverty as the proportion of poor persons living in extremely poor neighborhoods. The authors define extremely poor neighborhoods as census tracts in which at least 40 percent of the residents are below the poverty line.

Bane and Jargowsky report the proportion of poor persons living in extremely poor neighborhoods in 1970 and 1980. These proportions can be thought of as the chances that a poor person will live in a extremely poor neighborhood.

Table 2 shows the fifteen cities with the largest proportion of poor persons living in extremely poor neighborhoods in 1980. The first column of percentages is the concentration rate for 1970, the second column is the rate for 1980, and the third column is the percentage point change in the rate between 1970 and 1980. Newark had the highest concentration in 1980 (49 percent) and the largest increase in its rate between 1970 and 1980 (31 percentage points). The last row in the table consists of the concentration rates for the fifty largest cities as a whole.

TABLE 2
Concentration of Poor Persons in Extremely Poor Neighborhoods, 1970-1980 (in the Fifteen Cities with the Highest Rates of Concentration in 1980)

Top 15 Cities	1970 (%)	1980 (%)	1970-1980 Change
Newark NJ	17	49	31
Atlanta GA	32	41	10
Cincinnati OH	35	40	6
New Orleans LA	46	39	-8
Memphis TN	45	35	-10
New York NY	11	34	23
Baltimore MD	28	34	6
Louisville KY	27	33	6
Tampa FL	29	33	4
Chicago IL	15	32	17
Philadelphia PA	16	31	15
Cleveland OH	23	29	6
Norfolk VA	41	28	-13
Nashville TN	18	27	9
Birmingham AL	32	26	-6
50 Largest Cities	16	24	8

SOURCE: Adapted from Bane and Jargowsky

As Table 2 shows, *there was a very large increase in the proportion of poor city dwellers living in extremely poor neighborhoods.* For the fifty largest cities as a whole, the concentration rate increased from 16 percent to 24 percent (an increase of 50 percent). Thus, nearly one quarter of the large city poor population lived in extremely poor neighborhoods in 1980.

The cities with the highest concentration rates vary by size. The top fifteen list includes both the two largest (New York and Chicago) and three of the smallest (Norfolk, Tampa, and Louisville, each with fewer than 300,000 persons) of the fifty largest cities.

It is an open question whether even smaller cities have similar levels and changes in the concentration of their poor residents. *But in this study, it appears that medium-size cities are not exempt from high concentration rates.*

On the other hand, in terms of numbers *the concentrated poor are themselves concentrated in a few large cities.* There were 1,615,109 poor people living in extremely poor neighborhoods in the fifty largest cities in 1980; New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia alone accounted for nearly one-half of this total.

The cities are drawn from three of the four regions of the United States (three from the Northeast, three from the Midwest, and nine from the South). Only cities from the West are absent from the table.

There is a regional pattern to the change in concentration. All of the four cities with a decrease in their concentration rate are in the South, while the four cities with the largest increase in concentration are in the Northeast or Midwest.

Bane and Jargowsky provide evidence of a number of interesting changes in concentrated poverty, including findings on concentration by race.

TABLE 3
Concentrated Poverty by Race, 1980

Region Top 15 Cities from Table 2	Percentage of Poor Persons Living in Extremely Poor Neighborhoods			
	Total (%)	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)
50 LARGEST CITIES	24	7	36	26
Northeast	32	7	42	44
Midwest	25	9	36	12
South	24	7	35	17
West	8	2	16	9
Newark NJ	49	17	56	43
Atlanta GA	41	16	46	35
Cincinnati OH	40	18	57	41
New Orleans LA	39	6	48	18
Memphis TN	35	8	41	41
New York NY	34	8	45	45
Baltimore MD	34	12	42	31
Louisville KY	33	18	48	28
Tampa FL	33	7	58	21
Chicago IL	32	4	47	12
Philadelphia PA	31	8	39	59
Cleveland OH	29	6	43	10
Norfolk VA	28	5	41	18
Nashville TN	27	10	44	43
Birmingham AL	26	8	30	36

SOURCE: Bane and Jargowsky

Table 3 shows the percentage of poor whites, blacks, and Hispanics living in extremely poor neighborhoods. Thus, in all fifty cities, 24 percent of all poor persons lived in high poverty areas and 7 percent of white poor persons lived in high poverty areas. The next four rows of the table show similar percentages for each region, and the bottom fifteen rows show these percentages for the fifteen cities with the highest concentration rates (for all poor persons) in 1980 (from Table 2). Again, these percentages may be thought of as the chances that, for example, a black poor person in Newark lives in an extreme poverty area (56 out of 100).

As Table 3 shows, there are strong racial differences in concentrated poverty. *In the fifty largest cities, a poor black person was five times more likely to live in an extreme poverty neighborhood than a poor white person* (36 percent versus 7 percent). This pattern holds in all parts of the country and in all of the fifteen cities with the largest concentrated poverty populations in 1980.

The North Central region of the United States had the highest rate of concentration among poor whites in 1980 (9 percent). The Northeast region had the highest rate of concentration among poor blacks (42 percent) and poor Hispanics (44 percent).

Among the fifteen cities listed in the table, Cincinnati and Louisville had the highest concentration rate among poor whites (18 percent). Tampa had the highest concentration among poor blacks (56 percent). Philadelphia had the greatest concentration among poor Hispanics (59 percent)

Most striking, however, is the fact that in none of these cities is the black concentration rate less than two-and-one-half times the white rate, and in most cities the black rate is four or five times the white rate. *In Chicago, poor blacks are eleven times more likely to live in extremely poor neighborhoods than poor whites.*

Isolation

The third new dimension of poverty in cities is "isolation". Concentration considers the conditions in specific neighborhoods – for example, the number of extreme poverty neighborhoods. Isolation refers to a person's or a neighborhood's relation to the larger society and the surrounding metropolis – for example, the interaction between poor neighborhoods and the rest of the city or region. Isolation is important because it gives us an indication of the chances open to a poor person to connect with wider opportunities.

The idea of "social isolation" has been developed in a highly influential book by William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*.[4] He suggests that the black ghetto has become detached from the larger society with fewer middle-class black households and weaker social institutions. This lack of access to role models and supporting affiliations has created a social isolation that limits the ability of poor blacks to escape from pover-

ty. Current research by Wilson attempts to document this social isolation, and it will add greatly to our understanding of this phenomenon.

Another recent study, by the author of this report, develops the idea of "geographic isolation".[5] Here the idea is that the ghetto has become increasingly segregated from opportunities located in the surrounding metropolis. Certain metropolitan areas have become more clearly segregated into places of better and worse socioeconomic and physical conditions. As the differences between the ghetto and the metropolis widen, ghetto dwellers live in more and more isolated deprivation. This process is the formation of the "impacted ghetto".

Measuring this impacted ghetto is a two-step process. First, neighborhoods are identified that have levels of deprivation (in this study, male unemployment, welfare, female-headed families, school leaving) that are at least twice the average of neighborhoods throughout the surrounding metropolitan area. By comparing this measure in 1970 and 1980, it is possible to identify any metropolitan areas in which impacted ghettos were formed.

TABLE 4
Impacted Ghetto* Formation in the Metropolitan Areas Containing the 50 Largest Cities

Total Top 5 Metro Areas	1970 Tracts*	1980 Tracts*	Additional Tracts 1970-1980*	Change 1970-1980
Largest SMSAs	149	330	181	121%
Philadelphia	8	44	36	450%
Detroit	10	41	31	310%
Chicago	15	35	20	133%
Baltimore	9	22	13	144%
Cleveland	9	21	12	133%

* Census tracts that have at least twice the median level for census tracts of four characteristics (male unemployment, female-headed families, teenage dropouts, and households receiving welfare) in the metropolitan area.

As Table 4 shows, *several metropolitan areas in the Northeast and North Central regions of the country saw the formation of large impacted ghettos between 1970 and 1980.*

This phenomenon was not typical across the country. The top five metropolitan areas account for one-half of impacted ghetto tracts in 1980 and for two-thirds of the expansion of impacted ghetto tracts between 1970 and 1980. (Furthermore, twenty of the largest metropolitan areas had no change or a decrease in the number of impacted ghetto tracts between 1970 and 1980.)

The second step in examining isolation is to determine the geography of these impacted ghettos. Figure 1 maps the formation of the impacted ghetto in Philadelphia, the metropolitan area with the largest number of tracts and the largest increase.

Figure 1 shows that the impacted ghetto has been formed in precisely the older, more central parts of the traditional poor ghetto. The pattern displayed for Philadelphia is typical of the metropolitan areas listed in Table 4.

The central part of the Philadelphia metropolitan area has four large poverty areas that are each adjacent to the central city's downtown: North Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, and Camden. In each of these areas, an impacted ghetto was formed between 1970 and 1980. All of the impacted ghetto neighborhoods were poverty neighborhoods in 1970 and virtually all are surrounded by poverty neighborhoods (and/or parks and rivers) in 1980.

Thus, impacted ghetto tracts have emerged in the most isolated parts of the traditional ghetto. *The impacted ghetto is a place characterized by substantial isolated deprivation.*

Figure 1
Philadelphia Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (part)

1970 Impacted Ghetto: 8 Tracts Containing 29,445 Persons

1980 Impacted Ghetto: 44 Tracts Containing 194,730 Persons

TOWARD EXPLANATION

There have been several attempts to explain the changing quality and increasing intensity of poverty in cities. This section examines three leading explanations: mismatch, culture, and decentralization.

Mismatch

The first explanation can be discussed under the title "mismatch," which refers to the large-scale transformation of the economy resulting, in particular, in increased education and skills requirements for employment.

The national economy has shifted from blue-collar oriented manufacturing industries toward white-collar and "new-collar" oriented service and information processing industries. This shift has fostered a decreasing demand for unskilled workers, and technical and/or interpersonal skills are becoming a requirement for labor market survival.

A leading proponent of this explanation, Kasarda,[6] has documented the changing requirements of the labor markets in large cities. Precisely such cities contain large numbers of persons with lower education attainments who have been left behind by the changes in the economy. Kasarda labels this process the "emerging urban mismatch".

TABLE 5
Central City Jobs in Industries by Mean Education of Employees

City	Number of Jobs (000)			Change	
	1959	1970	1985	1959-70	1970-85
New York					
Less than high school	1561	1525	1048	-9	-504
Some higher education	682	1002	1270	320	268
Philadelphia					
Less than high school	466	430	243	-36	-187
Some higher eduction	135	205	256	70	51
Baltimore					
Less than high school	236	207	132	-29	-75
Some higher education	59	90	124	31	34
Atlanta					
Less than high school	130	179	182	49	3
Some higher education	42	92	143	50	51

SOURCE: Adapted from Kasarda.

As Table 5 shows, *many of the cities discussed in the preceding sections of this report have undergone extensive changes in the educational requirements of their economies.* This transformation excludes many poor central-city residents from participating in the service-sector and information-processing economy.

Culture

A second explanation of changing poverty in cities is "culture". This explanation refers to the values and aspirations of ghetto dwellers that appear to be at odds with those of mainstream society. These values regarding work and family might disable many ghetto residents from participating in the economy and from escaping poverty. This explanation is behind much of the discussions of a new "underclass".

Many research questions remain unresolved on this issue. Although the culture explanation might seem true on its face, most versions fail to withstand careful consideration. *It is important to limit our use of this concept* unless and until it is better supported by evidence.

However, the media has continued to articulate this kind of explanation:

> "No one who has watched Bill Moyer's *CBS Reports* on the black family's decline, or read Leon Dash's series on black teenage pregnancy in the *Washington Post*, or Nicholas Lemann's recent *Atlantic* article on the 'Origins of the Underclass', or

> Ken Auletta's book on the same subject, can doubt that there is a culture of poverty out there that has taken on a life of its own."[7]
>
> "The heart of the matter is the continued existence and expansion of what has come to be called the Underclass...And in the last decade, I've watched this group of American citizens harden and condense, moving further away from the basic requirements of a human life: work, family, safety, the law."[8]

The most influential scholarly proponent of the "underclass" idea is Wilson, and he firmly rejects this notion of an intractable culture of poverty.[9] Wilson accepts many of the disturbing descriptions of behavior in the ghetto. However, he attempts to relate these behaviors to changes in the economy such as deindustrialization.

Wilson argues that, rather than having a "life of its own," ghetto culture is a product of the diminished opportunities available in the contemporary ghetto. If these opportunities are changed, then the values, aspirations, and behaviors of the "underclass" would change accordingly.

DiIulio has drawn a compelling parallel.[10] In the early 1980s, many cried that corporate decision makers were underinvesting in America because of government regulation and taxation. But the resulting policy debate focused on changing the incentives, not on changing a "culture of underinvestment". Nobody designed a program around a slogan like "Just Say No to Underinvestment". Instead, we changed the tax law.

Decentralization

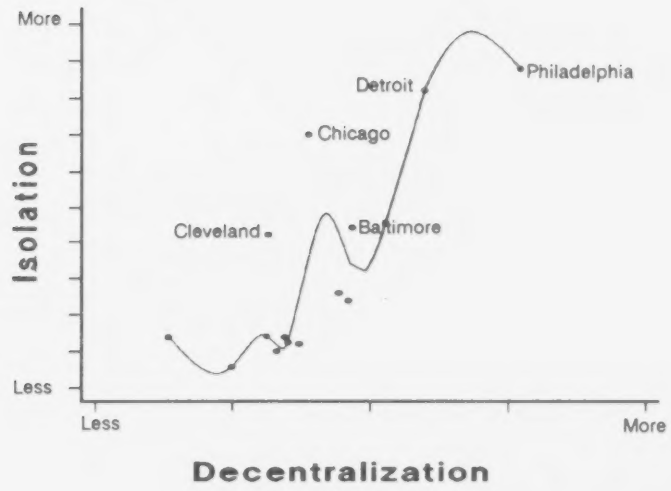
A third explanation of the changing quality of poverty in cities can be discussed as "decentralization". This explanation adds an explicitly geographical perspective to the preceding explanations. While mismatch explanations focus on the changing conditions of central cities, decentralization explanations focus on the changing conditions within metropolitan areas. The structure of metropolitan areas has changed in ways that severely limit the access of the ghetto to opportunity.

Technological innovations and public policies have led many employers to decentralize from central cities toward peripheral suburbs. In one simple example, production technology has changed from vertical (requiring multi-story loft buildings) to horizontal (requiring single-story buildings). Such a change toward horizontal production requires much more land and has led many firms to lower-cost suburbs. In another example, federal highway policies and transportation and inventory innovations have led trucking to replace railroads as the dominant goods-moving sector. As a result, peripheral beltways have replaced central terminals as primary business locations.

Decentralization as an explanation of isolation has been examined by the author of this report. Is there a relationship between the extent of metropolitan decentralization and the formation of an impacted ghetto?

One exploratory answer to this question is provided in Figure 2, which shows a scatterplot of fifteen northeastern metropolitan areas.

Figure 2
Relation of Isolation and Decentralization in the Northeast



Each dot represents a metropolitan area, and each metropolitan area is plotted in relation to its level of isolation (the number of impacted ghetto tracts as described in the section on isolation) and its level of decentralization (the percentage point difference in manufacturing employment loss between the central county and the metropolitan area as a whole). The curve in the figure represents the relationship between isolation and decentralization.

Employment decentralization appears to account for much of the size of impacted ghettos in northeastern metropolitan areas. The lesser the extent of decentralization, the smaller the size of the impacted ghetto. The greater the extent of decentralization, the larger the size of the impacted ghetto.

TOWARD POLICY

How we describe and explain a complex problem like urban poverty is crucial to how we design policy solutions. The proposed policies will be conditioned by our understanding of what is needed.

To the extent that a mismatch is the explanation of the problem, policy needs to provide training and education to match ghetto dwellers to the new economy. To the extent that culture is the explanation of the problem, policy needs to attempt a direct effort at cultural change. To the extent that decentralization is the explanation, policy needs to connect ghetto dwellers to opportunities on the metropolitan periphery.

To the extent that these problems vary at different times and different places, policy makers must be prepared to adapt their strategies to the situations.

The rest of this report examines in some detail particular strategies. When we understand the problems of the inner city as *isolation* from opportunity by decentralization, the policy goal becomes overcoming isolation by establishing and maintaining *connections* to opportunity.

It is interesting to note that the same isolation that creates barriers to entry-level employment for ghetto residents is creating severe labor shortage in the suburbs. This labor shortage is probably the largest single threat to continued expansion in many metropolitan economies. *So whether our attention is on the poor or on the economy, the issues are very much the same.*

Dispersal vs. Development Strategies

There have been two main strategies for connecting the ghetto to opportunity: dispersal strategies and development strategies. Both strategies start with the observation of metropolitan decentralization: employment and population have relocated toward the periphery while the poor have remained behind in the inner city.

Dispersal strategies seek to decentralize the residences of poor people from the central city to the suburbs. Development strategies seek to recentralize regional employment from the suburbs to the central city. Neither strategy has been wildly successful.

In essence, dispersal strategists misunderstand the sociology of the problem: socioeconomic mobility cannot be obtained or sustained simply by leaving the ghetto. They also underestimate the politics of the problem: the structure of our metropolitan settlements provides numerous mechanisms to prevent dispersal. Development strategists misunderstand the economics of the problem: jobs have relocated to the metropolitan periphery for reasons that would be too costly to reverse, if they could be reversed at all.

Each strategy provides a sufficient critique of the other. Yet those who think dispersal and development are the only options misunderstand (or simply ignore) the geography of the problem: *the same forces that have fostered metropolitan decentralization (for example, transportation and communication innovations) can be exploited to connect city residents to suburban jobs.*

A Mobility Strategy

A six-pronged *mobility strategy* would begin to make those connections.

First, *provide job training* to prepare city would-be workers for the suburban labor market of retail outlets, back-office operations, and high-tech light industry. The inner-city training problem is not necessarily one of preparing would-be-workers for the "knowledge-intensive" economy of the central city. The training gap between present skills and needed skills is clearly smaller for blue-collar employment (which has decentralized to the periphery) than for the white-collar employment that has come to dominate the central-city economy. The fact that the central-city labor market is more knowledge-intensive creates a so-called "mismatch" only if the analysis remains bounded by the central city itself. The foundation of the mobility strategy is that the central city (and its distressed neighborhoods) is in fact part of a larger metropolitan labor market. "Mismatches" are an artifact of census geography. The real problems rest with the information and transportation barriers that prevent the city and suburbs from acting as a single labor market.

Second, *create job information systems* to match city workers to suburban employers. One recent study shows that there is significant spatial disequilibrium in metropolitan labor markets – labor surplus in the central city, labor shortage in the suburbs. Because of this disequilibrium, wages are rising in peripheral areas. Yet ghetto workers are often isolated from these opportunities by a lack of information. As a result, central-city Private Industry Councils are often people banks, while suburban ones are job banks. Reorganizing these banks from county to regional organizations is a way to improve the job information system.

Third, *restructure transportation systems* to facilitate outbound journeys-to-work. This might include modifying routes, schedules, and fares within public transit systems, as well as subsidizing private automobile costs (insurance, fuel, etc.). This subsidy need not be wholly public. More and more suburban employers are cooperating with transit authorities and paying for much or all of the costs of new routes. Employer-sponsored vanpooling is another option. This is often an efficient move for suburban employers because it is typically less expensive to subsidize transportation for a group of workers (who can share some of the transportation services) than to raise wages sufficiently to cover the costs of individual commuting. Also, community development groups and other community groups represent an untapped resource for the organization and maintenance of transportation alternatives. Of course, many of these "reverse commuting" programs were tried in demonstration projects during the late 1960s and early 1970s. These demonstrations were widely acknowledged to be less than successful. But again, the informal evidence from around the country seems to indicate that the incentives for cooperation (for example, labor shortage in the suburbs) are much stronger now than fifteen or twenty years ago.[11] SEPTA, the transit authority in the Philadelphia region, has planned several reverse commuting routes. Ridership on the implemented routes is far exceeding expectations.

Fourth, *provide day care* facilities and subsidies for parents of young children while they are training for jobs, searching for jobs, or working. It is clear that many of the people who could benefit from the mobility strategy are women with young children. As in many other strategies for confronting the problems of poverty, child care would be absolutely essential to making the benefits of the mobility strategy available to these parents.

Fifth, *increase the level of the earned income credit* to supplement the wages of entry-level jobs. The credit provides a mechanism for supporting low-income workers while delivering that support through employment. It also helps increase the attractiveness of employment opportunities. The mobility strategy would involve significant transportation costs on relatively lower wage workers. The incidence of those costs could fall on the workers, the employers, or the public. This incidence is always a complex question and would certainly shift as the relative accessibility of peripheral employment is increased through the programs outlined above (that is, firms would likely attempt to

lower the extraordinarily high entry-level wages they are now paying to attract workers). The earned income credit would provide a mechanism by which to moderate the incidence of these costs on workers.

Sixth, *modify policing and correctional practices* to protect the residents of the impacted ghetto from the criminals in their midst.[12] This should include community policing programs and intensive probation and parole programs. Community policing would help to protect the lives and property of the law-abiding residents of these areas better than they are protected now. Intensive probation and parole programs would improve conventional programs, which involve little direct supervision of offenders and are highly unstructured. The average probation or parole agent has about two hundred offenders to monitor. These intensive supervision programs are more expensive than conventional community-based programs. But the relevant comparison is between these programs and incarceration. While it is too soon to pronounce these programs a complete success, preliminary evaluations have been encouraging – a savings of $6,500 per offender per year, lower recidivism, and offenders able to return something other than trouble to their community.

Global competition, limits on new immigration, industrial restructuring, and metropolitan decentralization have combined to create a window for directing attention to helping the disadvantaged largely because the economy needs the labor to survive. *One of the chief strengths of the mobility strategy is that it seeks to exploit these incentives throughout the metropolitan area.*

City residents get access to economic opportunity without sacrificing community networks such as extended family and institutional affiliations. Suburban employers get access to the entry-level workers who are increasingly absent from suburban labor markets. City governments retain voters who have received the benefits of the strategy. Suburban governments can ease housing development pressures being driven by the excess labor demand of decentralizing employment within the region.

The point of this strategy is to reconnect the ghetto to opportunity. That connection has been disrupted by metropolitan decentralization and other factors. The components of the mobility strategy are designed to restore that connection by exploiting the very incentives created by decentralization itself.

In our complex urban fabric, the ghetto has become a frayed and forgotten place. Rather than patch it and hope the patch holds, the mobility strategy seeks to reweave the ghetto into the fabric of the metropolis. We would all benefit from the stronger fabric that results.

NOTES

1 Larry C. Ledebur, *Poverty in America* (*Research Report*, National League of Cities, Washington D.C., March 1987).

2 Terry K. Adams, Greg J. Duncan, and Willard L. Rodgers, *Persistent Urban Poverty: Prevalence, Correlates, and Trends* (Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, February 1988).

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11 See, "Jobs Go to the Suburbs, Mass Transit Doesn't" in *The Chicago Tribune* (September 15,1986, p.1); "Home in the City, Job in the Suburbs" in *The New York Times* (September 15 1986, Sec. CN p.1); "SEPTA to Carry City Workers to Suburban Office" in *The Philadelphia Business Journal* (February 22, 1988, p.1); "Suburban Economic Hubs Vying for Workers" in *The Washington Post* (July 22, 1986, Sec. A, p. 1); and "Transit Key to Overcoming Economic Segregation" in *Metro Monitor (Minneapolis-St Paul)* (July-August 1988, p. 6). With the support of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the National League of Cities, I am now engaged in a one-year study of these programs around the country.

12 John J. DiIulio, Jr. and Mark Alan Hughes, *The Real Underclass Problem* (Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, October 1988).

About The National League of Cities

The National League of Cities was established in 1924 by and for reform-minded state municipal leagues. It now represents 49 leagues and more than 1,300 cities directly and, through the membership of the state municipal leagues, more than 16,000 cities indirectly.

NLC serves as an advocate for its members in Washington in the legislative, administrative, and judicial processes that affect them; develops and pursues a national urban policy that meets the present and future needs of our nation's cities and the people who live in them; offers training, technical assistance and information to municipal officials to help them improve the quality of local government in our urban nation; and undertakes research and analysis on topics and issues of importance to the nation's cities.